Opening Statement By Chairman Vernon J. Ehlers

Good morning ladies and gentleman, the Committee on House Administration will come to order. The Committee meets today for a hearing on electronic voting machines.

The election that will occur in just a few weeks will be the first general federal election conducted since the Help America Vote Act of 2002, or HAVA, was fully implemented. That Act, passed by this Congress in response to the voting system weaknesses exposed during the 2000 recount in Florida, set new standards for voting systems that were meant to make our elections more accurate and accessible.

Three billion dollars were appropriated pursuant to HAVA, with most of these monies being dedicated to new equipment purchases by jurisdictions that wanted to improve their voting systems. As a result, many jurisdictions are using new equipment for the first time this year.
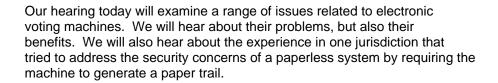
Though HAVA did not require the adoption of any particular kind of technology, many jurisdictions purchased electronic voting systems because they felt these systems were best able to meet the requirements of HAVA. Not surprisingly, some jurisdictions using this new equipment for the first time have encountered some difficulties.

Just two weeks ago, in nearby Montgomery County, Maryland,
polls were not able to open on time because poll workers were sent to their posts without the cards necessary to start up the electronic machines.

In the wake of this episode, a column appeared in the Washington Post under the headline, "If Paper Ballots Restore Trust in Elections, Let's Switch". The column noted - "People trust paper ballots because they're real. You can hold them in your hand and count them again if you need to."

Indeed.

Before it had electronic voting machines, Montgomery County used a punch card system.

Need we be reminded of the problems we had with that system?

I would direct your attention to the screen above.

(First Slide Appears)

You will see there some images of people with paper ballots.

Here's one of a group of people staring at paper punch cards trying to figure out if they constitute a vote and if so for whom.

(Second Slide Appears)

You can see this gentleman holding a ballot in his hand and trying to count it.

(Third Slide Appears)

You can see this man has "Got Paper"

These pictures, of course, were taken in Florida during the 2000 recount.

Do these images inspire trust and confidence?

H.L. Mencken once said, "For every complex problem there is an answer that is clear, simple, and wrong."

Unfortunately, the problems some jurisdictions have experienced with their new systems have caused some to suggest that we should revert to a reliance on paper.

We know from painful and bitter experience, that paper systems can fail to deliver accurate results and are susceptible to manipulation. To ignore this reality, and assert that paper somehow ensures integrity is simplistic and wrong.

In fact, no voting system, by itself, can guarantee election integrity. The best system on earth will fail if not properly maintained and deployed.

Our hearing today will examine a range of issues related to electronic voting machines. We will hear about their problems, but also their benefits. We will also hear about the experience in one jurisdiction that tried to address the security concerns of a paperless system by requiring the machine to generate a paper trail.

This hearing is being held to educate the Members, and the public, about these complicated issues. I hope when the hearing is over, we will have a better understanding of the problems and benefits of these new technologies. I also hope that as we look for solutions to these complicated problems, we resist the temptation to settle on answers that are clear, simple and wrong.

I yield to the Ranking Member for an opening statement.